

Case study: Mosque open day

What was the issue to address?

There was a clear need to overcome some of the myths that led mosques and Islamic practice to be largely misunderstood. Realising that mosques could take a proactive role in changing perceptions and building better community relationships, urgent work began to break down such negative associations.

What did we do?

Working in partnership with community development officers and community cohesion project officers supported a local mosque in Heckmondwike to host a community open day with volunteers and community leaders also taking part. The mosque was formerly a Catholic Sunday School and this provided a point of interest to attract indigenous communities whose children had previously attended the Sunday School. The mosque opened its doors to welcome local residents, schools and the local media. Visitors were given the opportunity to take a guided tour of the mosque and ask questions in an informal and friendly atmosphere. There was also an Islamic exhibition on display to raise awareness about the contribution Islamic scholars had made to modern civilisation and philosophy.

The mosque had also prepared a short, interactive learning package specially designed for schools. This was supported by the Kirklees Interfaith Council to ensure that the information provided was of a high standard.

What difference did we make?

Over 300 people visited the mosque in a steady stream throughout the day, people came from both the immediate locality and surrounding areas. Men, women and young people who had never seen inside a mosque were given the opportunity to explore the building and take away helpful reading resources such as copies of the Quran printed in English and other languages but also information leaflets on topical issues including, the position of women in Islam.

A range of Council agencies supported the event, providing vital information and sign posting on adult social and health care, housing and job searching to name a few. The mosque proved to be the ideal venue for Council services to reach those communities that traditionally experienced obstacles in accessing up to date information on the services that are available to them.



People who visited on the day left with a better understanding of how mosques function day to day and with an increased awareness of the people who pray there. Visitors were given an opportunity to ask questions in a safe and informal environment where they were also free to talk to a leading Cleric. In the afternoon, the Cleric gave a talk on the role of mosques in improving community cohesion and endorsed 'British Islam' as the way forward for people to live with mutual respect, greater understanding and harmony.

What were the keys to our success?

Feedback from the day was overwhelmingly positive and encouraged the mosque to continue with its work to build better community relationships.

People were made to feel welcome and comfortable as there were no restrictions on dress and information was made available in a variety of languages including English.

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The mosque committee was keen to include women in their activities and kept the morning session for women only to attend as it was important for them to take part and gain equal access to the information that key services had provided on the day.

The event was promoted in local newspapers, by talking to people in the street, at local supermarkets and at the town centre to encourage people to come and find out what mosques were really about for themselves. It was important that the information given to people emphasised the opportunity to talk to different people and get to know people from another faith or background.

One of the visitors, Cath Burton gave the event the thumbs up and enthusiastically commented, "I've always been curious to find out what goes on in a mosque so I guess it's nosiness that's brought me here today and I've had my eyes opened. I've felt totally at ease here and I've learnt an awful lot. The event has been informative and we've been made to feel very welcome, we look forward to working with the mosque on future projects to build better community relationships".



What are we doing next?

The mosque is committed to improving community cohesion in the area and is being supported to expand its projects to bring people of different faiths, ages and backgrounds together. Of its proposed plans, the mosque intends to develop a constitution, and open an information technology suite aimed at bringing the local elderly groups and youth together. The mosque is also opening its doors to the media so that journalists may witness live Friday prayers and sermons as a means to raise public awareness of what actually goes on inside. The mosque volunteers have also been invited by other faith communities to visit their places of worship and exchange ideas on how to work more closely in the future.

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